

# THE SONIC SPIDER

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**The experience of feeling part of the life of another species affects people deeply. It is rare: there are few places where all life does not flee from humankind.**

The Sonic Spider, ‘the world’s first eight-legged musical instrument’ is the creation of scientist and science journalist Alun Anderson, musician/designer Charlie Beresford and composer/musician Camilla Saunders.

Its highly successful premiere performance was at the Oxford Science + Ideas Festival in October 2023. The Spider is now available for bookings in 2024.

It is an interactive instrument, that attempts to explore the mind of the female orb web spider through sound. For humans, listening to the sounds around us is the closest that we can come to entering the spider’s world of vibrations.

Other musicians have tried to create sounds and music inspired by spiders’ webs, but they have relied on electronic sounds generated by computers. The Sonic Spider is the first to put a spider’s body at the centre, with the entire performance space representing the reach of the web. The goal is to capture more of the spider in her world. Her eight legs are ears, and she can feel the slightest vibration from anywhere in the web.

Orb web spiders see very little, and have to wait for hours for prey to land, so it is as if a human were to lie in a large field throughout an entire night, waiting for something – anything – to happen. It could be

the crash when a fly arrives, sending the spider sprinting across the web to bite and paralyze the prey before it escapes. It could be the arrival of a male, with whom she might mate, or whom she might eat, or both. The spider listens for dangerous predators, and

to the distinctive sounds of her web swaying in the wind that tell her if it is in good repair. The patient night passes ...

2 - 4 musicians play the spider instrument, and other musicians may interact at different distances away. Each performance has a brief introduction explaining the concept of the whole project and its underlying science.

The eight legs are made of steel. Each has piano wire stretched taut along it, and a contact microphone attached. The strings can be bowed, knocked, plucked. During intervals between performances, people of all ages can try their hand at playing, explore the accompanying exhibition and chat to the scientist and musicians. The instrument can be indoors or outside, weather permitting, and performances long or short - potentially all night in the summer. The spider cannot be left unsupervised for health and safety reasons. Depending on available time and space, there is the possibility of demonstrating how to build a prototype leg. We can also offer an improvising workshop for local musicians who wish to join in playing.

Tech spec: It needs a minimum of 6 square metres, to accommodate both the spider and players. More space required if incorporating other musicians. We have a simple sound system that can work outside but tech support and speakers etc would be helpful. It takes about an hour to assemble, and a little less to take apart. The whole instrument packs away into a normal sized car. Parts are quite heavy so we need to be able to drive onto the site and any help with carrying would be welcome.